

VERTIGO

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BUCKINGHAM
LEIALOHA
GREEN

FABLES

Oct '10

suggested for
mature readers
vertigo.com

97

Once upon a time, a forest-dwelling peasant girl named Rose Red arrived in a distant magical kingdom where her long-lost sister had recently married its crown prince.

She adapted to the courtly, and chivalrous life surprisingly quickly.

YOU'RE EVERY OUNCE AS LOVELY AS YOUR SISTER, LADY RED.

ONLY AS LOVELY, SIR ROLAND? NOT MORE THAN?

TO THAT I CAN ONLY ANSWER THAT SNOW WHITE'S BEAUTY CANNOT BE OVERMATCHED BY DICTATES OF MY UNMATCHED LOYALTY TO CROWN AND COUNTRY.

SHE IS THE ROYAL PRINCESS AFTER ALL, AND SOMEDAY TO BE MY QUEEN.

WELL SAID, SIR ROLAND. WELL SPOKEN.

Dark Age Party Girl

Chapter Four of Rose Red



GOOD MORNING, LADY ROSE. AS I ASK EVERY DAY, IS THERE ANY WAY IN WHICH I MIGHT BE OF SERVICE TO YOU?

MY DEAR BARON RYALD, AT LONG LAST IT TURNS OUT THAT THERE IS. YOU CAN CHASTISE SIR ROLAND FOR ME. HE JUST DEALT ME A TERRIBLE **INSULT**.



I NEVER!

I ONLY SAID--!

I ONLY MEANT--!

SCOUNDREL! I CALL YOU **BASE VILLAIN AND WORSE!**



MY GAGE IS **THROWN**, SIR! TAKE IT UP AND MEET ME ON THE FIELD OF HONOR, OR I WILL MARK YOU A COWARD AND A FALSE KNIGHT THROUGHOUT THE LAND.

BUT I ONLY--!



TELL HIM, SIR GEOFFREY. YOU WITNESSED ALL THAT TRANSPIRED HERE. I NEVER **INSULTED** HER!

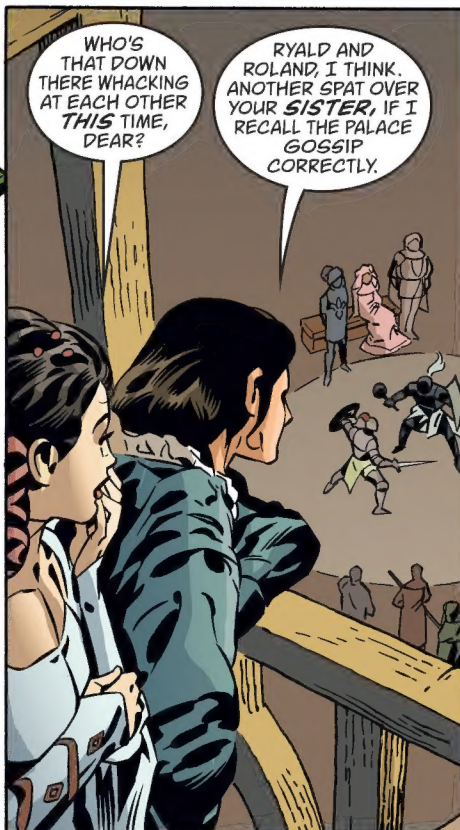
IT DOESN'T MATTER, SIR. THE GAGE HAS BEEN THROWN. UNLESS THE BARON PICKS IT UP AGAIN, YOU'RE OBLIGATED TO TAKE IT. OTHERWISE YOU **ARE UNCHIVALROUS AND COWARDLY**.



The next day...

THIS IS INSANE. I NEVER MEANT ANY SLIGHT.

NEVERTHELESS I'LL HAVE REDRESS IN THE LADY'S NAME. YOUR BLOOD OR MINE ON THE FIELD, SIR! NOTHING LESS!



WHO'S THAT DOWN THERE WHACKING AT EACH OTHER *THIS* TIME, DEAR?

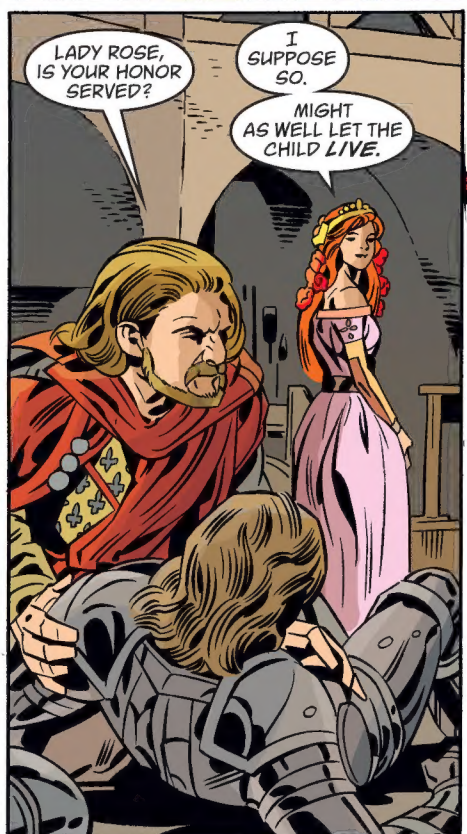
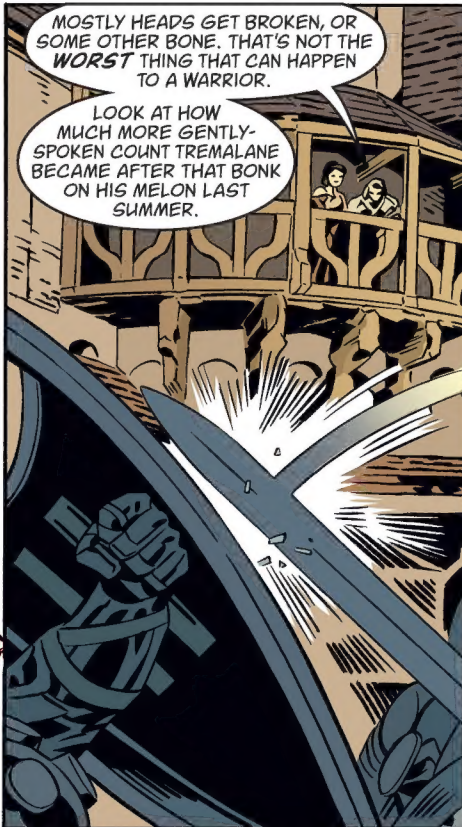
RYALD AND ROLAND, I THINK. ANOTHER SPAT OVER YOUR *SISTER*, IF I RECALL THE PALACE GOSSIP CORRECTLY.

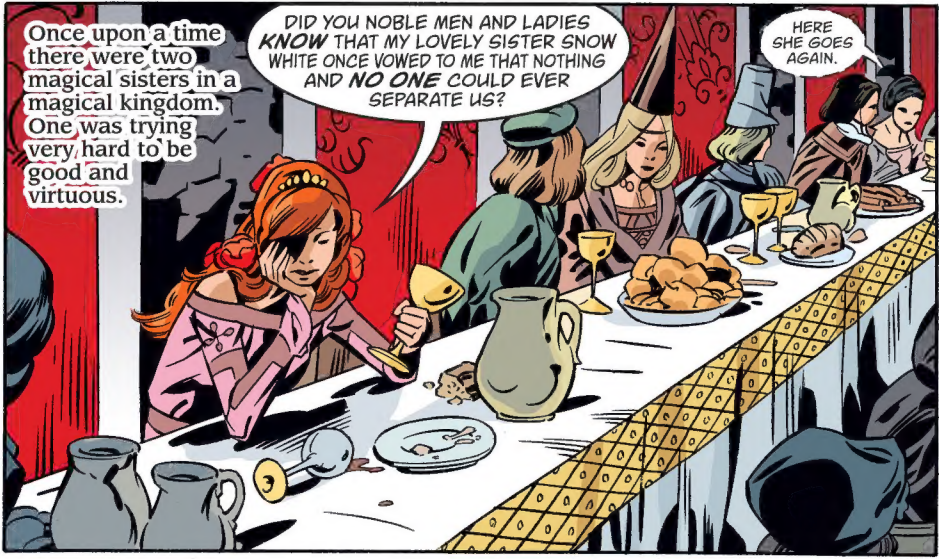


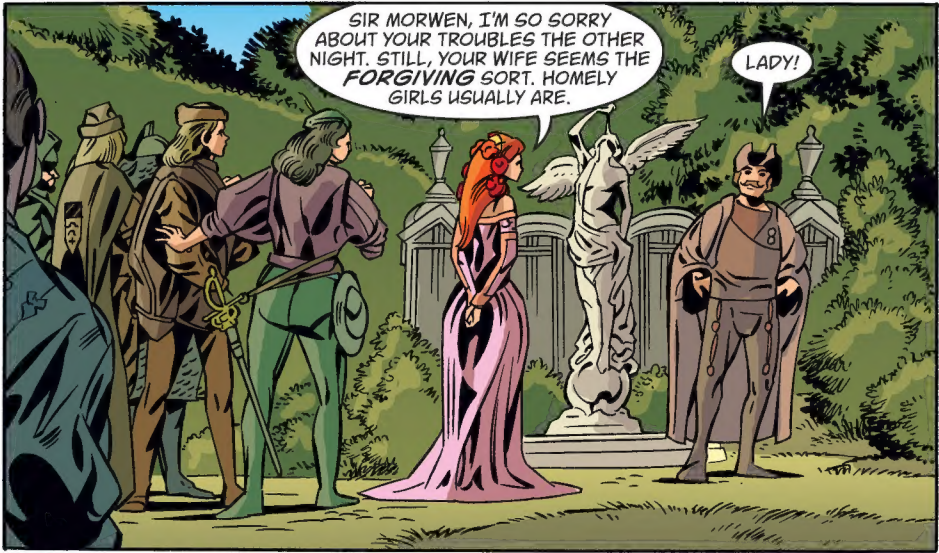
THERE'S BEEN AN AWFUL LOT OF THOSE LATELY.

IT'S THE WAY OF FIGHTING MEN, DEAREST. WITH NO WAR TO OCCUPY THEM, THEY'LL FIND *SOME-THING* TO SQUABBLE ABOUT. A PRETTY WOMAN IS AS GOOD A REASON AS ANY.

DON'T LET IT TROUBLE YOU, SNOW. IT'S WELL THAT OUR KNIGHTS WILL TEST THEMSELVES AGAINST EACH OTHER. KEEPS THEM BLOODED AND ABLE.







SIR MORWEN, I'M SO SORRY ABOUT YOUR TROUBLES THE OTHER NIGHT. STILL, YOUR WIFE SEEMS THE FORGIVING SORT. HOMELY GIRLS USUALLY ARE.

LADY!



I'VE THOUGHT OF A WAY YOU CAN MAKE IT UP TO ME.

MAKE IT UP TO YOU, LADY ROSE?

YES, FOR THE EMBARRASSMENT YOU CAUSED ME AT THE BANQUET.



BUT I WAS NEVER WITH YOU IN THE GARDENS!

YOU OR SOME OTHER KNIGHT. WHO CAN TELL IN THE DARK? AND BESIDES, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?




YOU'RE A SACRED BROTHERHOOD, RIGHT? IF ONE OF YOU SINS, YOU'RE ALL EQUALLY GUILTY.

SO THEN, IS IT TRUE WHAT I HEAR, THAT A FIERCE DRAGON DWELLS IN A CAVE IN THE MOUNTAINS TO THE NORTH?

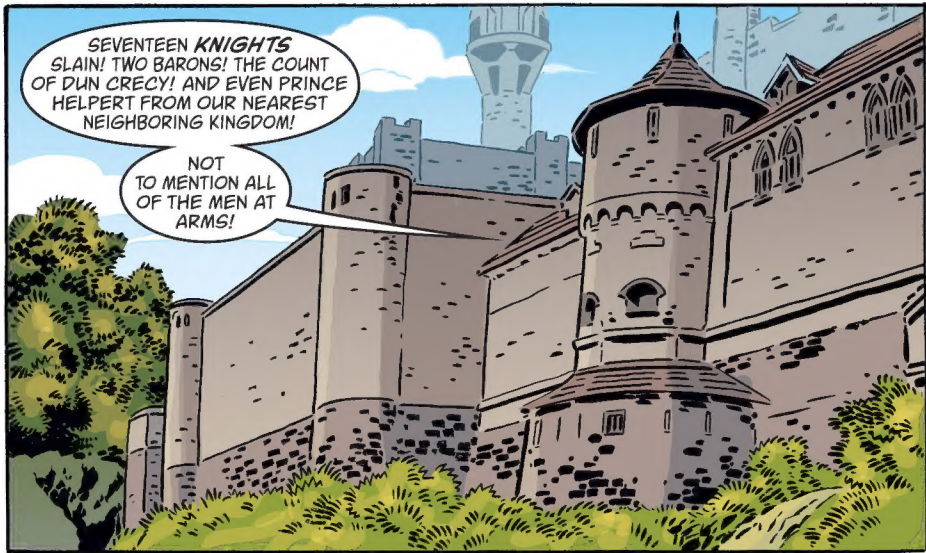


I MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO GRANT MY FAVOR IN THE NEXT JOUST TO WHICHEVER KNIGHT PROVED HIMSELF THE MOST PUISSANT BY BRINGING ME THE HEAD OF THAT EVIL BEAST.



Once upon a time many good knights and men at arms set off on a great quest to slay a fierce and terrible dragon.

They failed.



SEVENTEEN *KNIGHTS* SLAIN! TWO BARONS! THE COUNT OF DUN CRECY! AND EVEN PRINCE HELPERT FROM OUR NEAREST NEIGHBORING KINGDOM!

NOT TO MENTION ALL OF THE MEN AT ARMS!



THIS IS **OUTRAGEOUS!**

I WAS SIMPLY HAVING FUN.



FUN? **FUN!**

DO YOU IMAGINE IT'S FUN FOR ALL OF THOSE NEW *WIDOWS* WEEPING INTO THEIR PILLOWS TONIGHT?



AND THAT'S NOT THE WORST OF IT! NOT BY FAR!

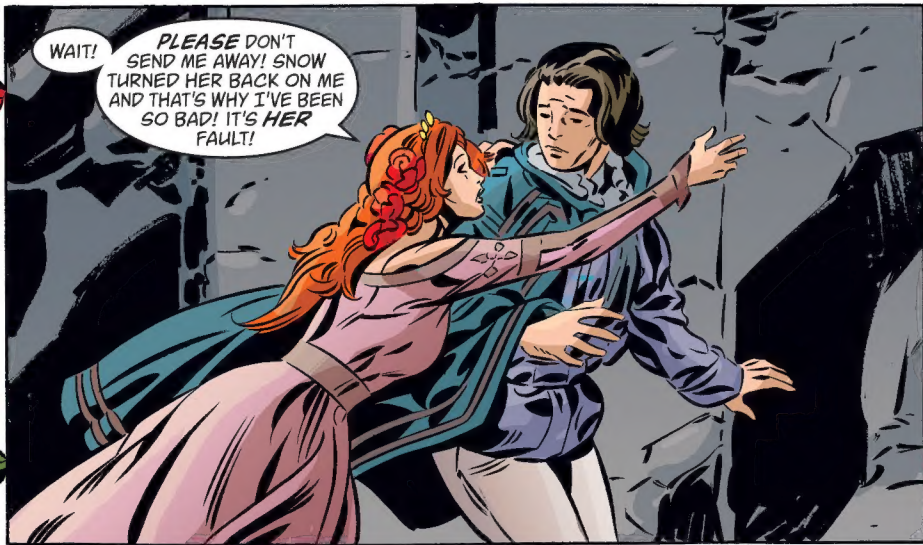
I PERSONALLY SPENT THREE DANGEROUS *YEARS* NEGOTIATING A PEACE TREATY WITH KARYNDERON, THE DRAGON YOU SO BLITHELY CONDEMNED FOR AN AFTERNOON'S AMUSEMENT.



FOR A NEAR SCORE OF YEARS THAT TREATY HELD.

UNTIL *YOU* TOSSED IT IN THE RUBBISH HEAP.

I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO--

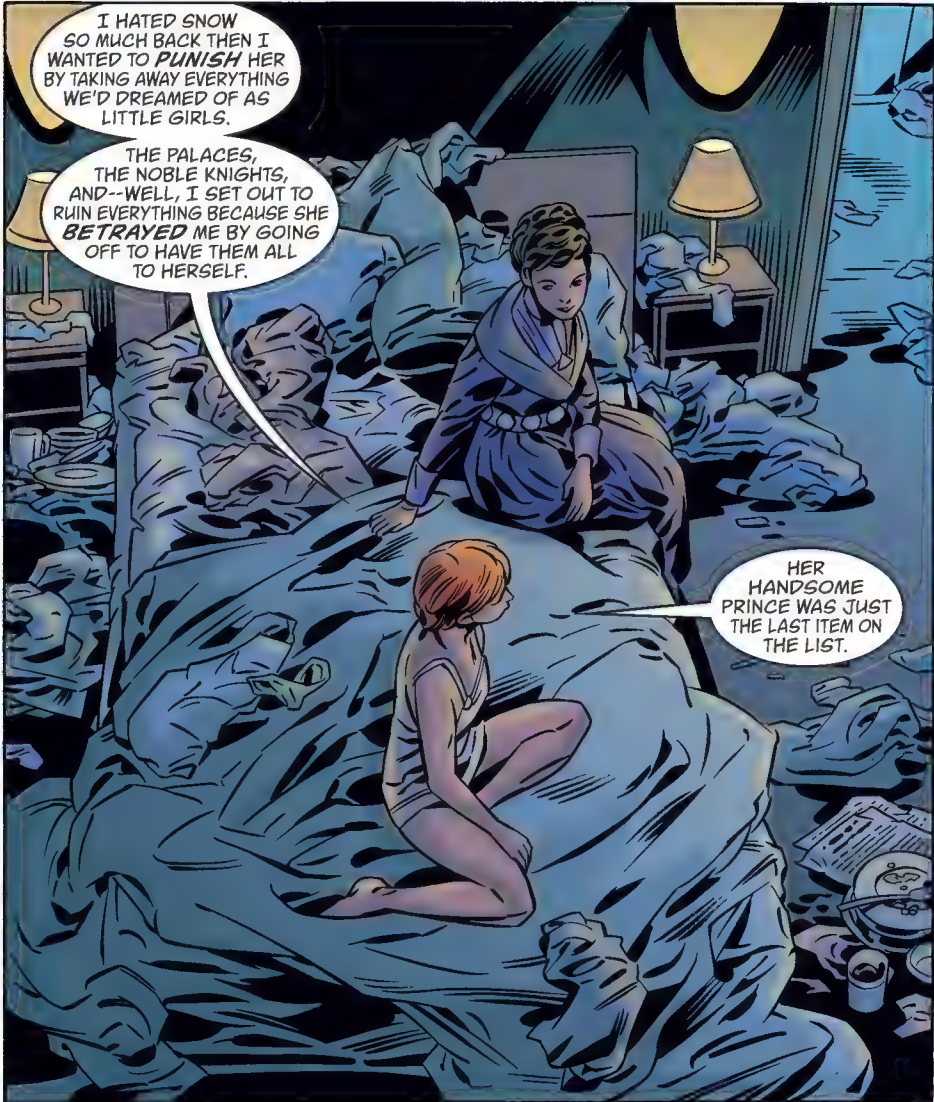




IT TOOK A SURPRISINGLY LONG TIME TO SEDUCE HIM, CONSIDERING HIS REPUTATION, BUT I WAS DETERMINED.



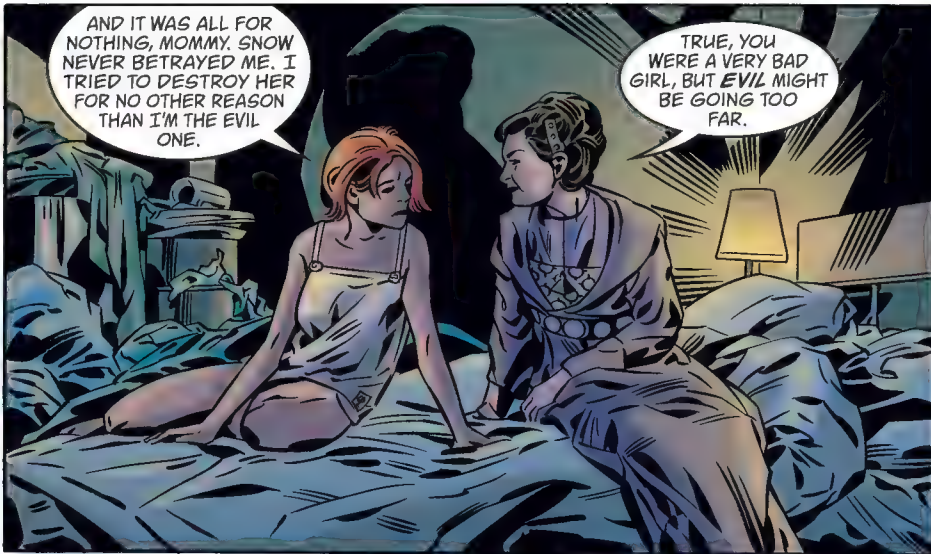
I APPROACHED IT LIKE A MILITARY CAMPAIGN, WITH CUNNING AND A PLAN OF CONTINUOUS ATTACK-AND-RETREAT UNTIL I'D WORN HIM DOWN.



I HATED SNOW SO MUCH BACK THEN I WANTED TO PUNISH HER BY TAKING AWAY EVERYTHING WE'D DREAMED OF AS LITTLE GIRLS.

THE PALACES, THE NOBLE KNIGHTS, AND--WELL, I SET OUT TO RUIN EVERYTHING BECAUSE SHE BETRAYED ME BY GOING OFF TO HAVE THEM ALL TO HERSELF.

HER HANDSOME PRINCE WAS JUST THE LAST ITEM ON THE LIST.



AND IT WAS ALL FOR NOTHING, MOMMY. SNOW NEVER BETRAYED ME. I TRIED TO DESTROY HER FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN I'M THE EVIL ONE.

TRUE, YOU WERE A VERY BAD GIRL, BUT **EVIL** MIGHT BE GOING TOO FAR.



AND I CAN NEVER MAKE UP FOR ALL THE HARM I DID.

NO, YOU CAN'T, FOR THOSE TERRIBLE DEEDS ARE LONG IN THE PAST. YOU CAN NO LONGER FIX THE THINGS YOU **DID**, BUT YOU CAN FIX THE BAD THINGS NOW THAT YOU DIDN'T CAUSE.



THERE'S A KIND OF REDEMPTION IN THAT.

THE FARM IS IN **TURMOIL**--PERCHED ON THE EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE, AND IN DANGER OF SLIDING OFF WITH THE SLIGHTEST **NUDGE**. THEY NEED A STRONG HAND, RIGHT NOW, TO SET IT BACK TO RIGHT.



THE SHEEP ARE IN THE MEADOW, AND THE COWS ARE IN THE CORN. SO WAKE UP, LITTLE DUCKLING, AND BLOW YOUR HORN.



BLUE.

THE LATEST OF SO MANY THINGS I FUCKED UP.

NOT AT ALL, ROSEBUD. YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH HIS DOOM. BUT HE LOVED YOU AND YOU CAN DRAW **STRENGTH** FROM THAT, IF YOU OPEN YOUR EYES AND LET YOURSELF BE THE CLEVER GIRL I RAISED.

NOW, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? THE DAWN IS COMING AND I'LL HAVE TO GO SOON.

YOU CAN GET UP, AND CLEAN UP, AND **FIGHT** FOR THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE.

OR YOU CAN CRAWL BACK INTO BED. I WARN YOU, THOUGH. THIS TIME, IF YOU SURRENDER, YOU'LL SUCCEED IN **DESTROYING** YOURSELF.

I'M SPENT. I WON'T BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO YOU.

DON'T WORRY. YOU'VE MADE YOUR CASE. I'M UP.

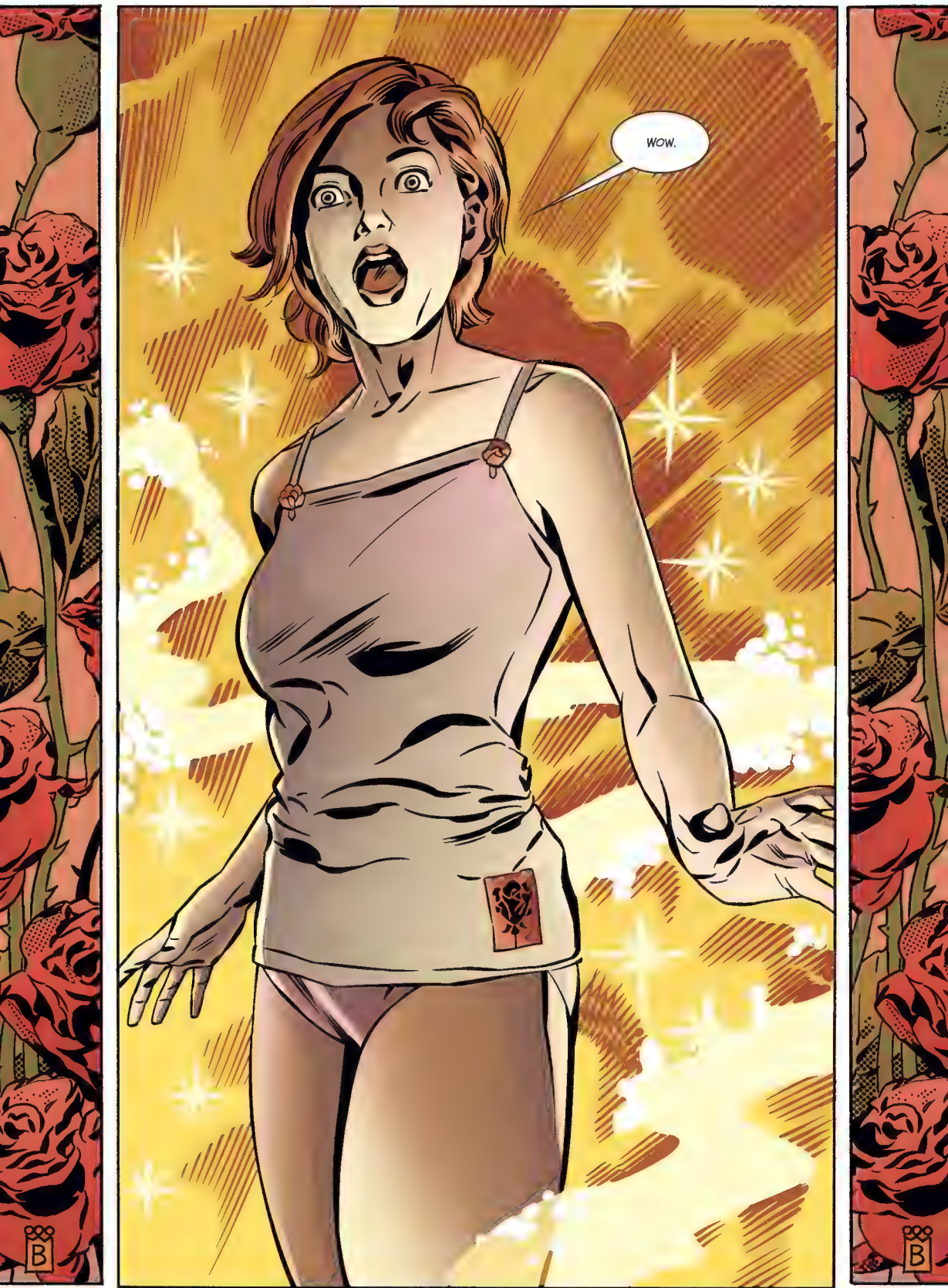
AND I'M FINALLY AWAKE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN--WELL, **HOWEVER LONG** IT'S BEEN.

I KNOW YOU'RE NOT REALLY MY MOTHER. AND YOU'RE NOT BOY BLUE, OR A PIG HEAD ON A STICK.

SO WHO ARE YOU? **WHAT ARE YOU?**

I DON'T NEED THE ILLUSION ANYMORE, SO CAN YOU SHOW ME YOUR REAL FACE? I'VE TRUSTED YOU, AT LONG LAST. WILL YOU DO THE SAME FOR ME?

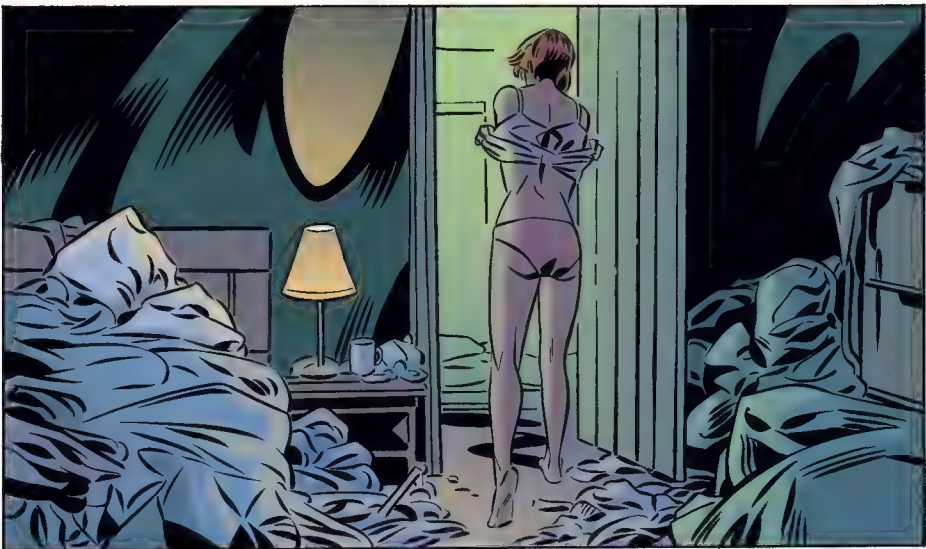
AS YOU WISH.

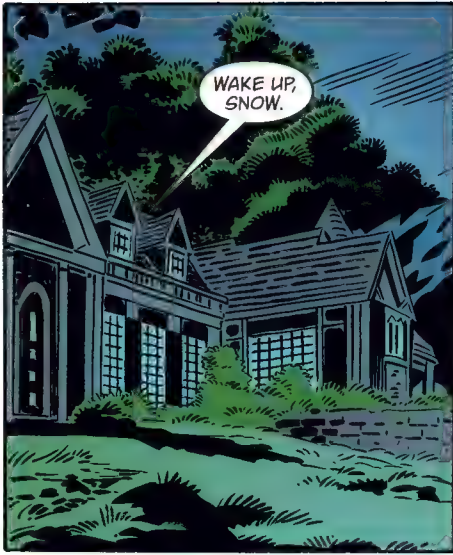


WOW.

B

B



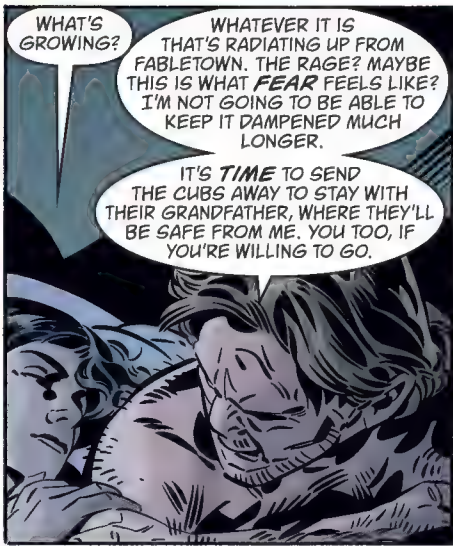


WAKE UP, SNOW.



WHASS'MATTER, H'NEY?

IT'S GROWING STRONGER. **TOO** STRONG.



WHAT'S GROWING?

WHATEVER IT IS THAT'S RADIATING UP FROM FABLETOWN. THE RAGE? MAYBE THIS IS WHAT **FEAR** FEELS LIKE? I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO KEEP IT DAMPENED MUCH LONGER.

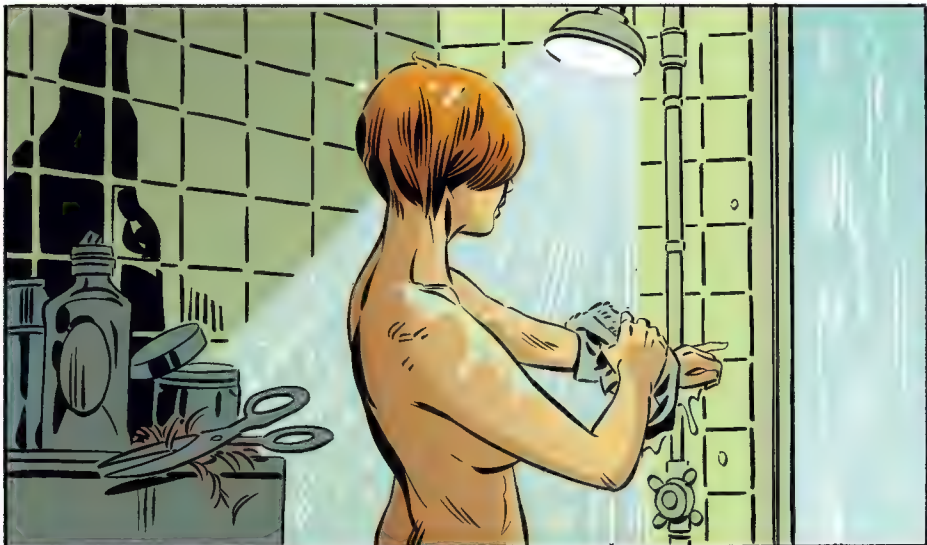
IT'S **TIME** TO SEND THE CUBS AWAY TO STAY WITH THEIR GRANDFATHER, WHERE THEY'LL BE SAFE FROM ME. YOU TOO, IF YOU'RE WILLING TO GO.

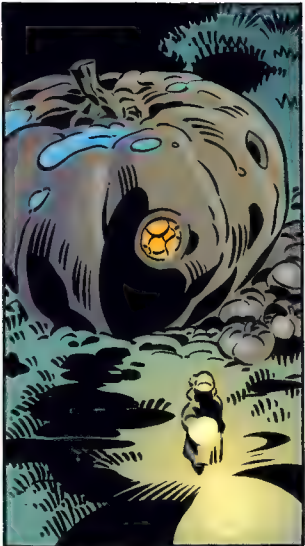


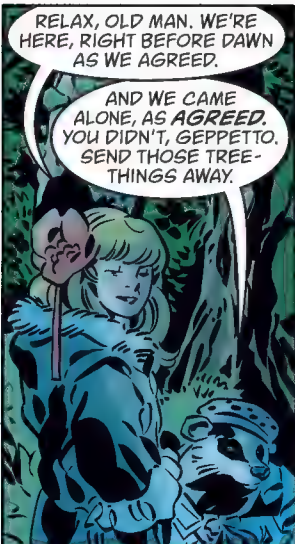
YOU KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT ALREADY, BIGBY.

NOT A CHANCE.

BUT YES, WE'LL SEND THE **CHILDREN** TO SAFETY. LET'S GET THEM UP NOW.

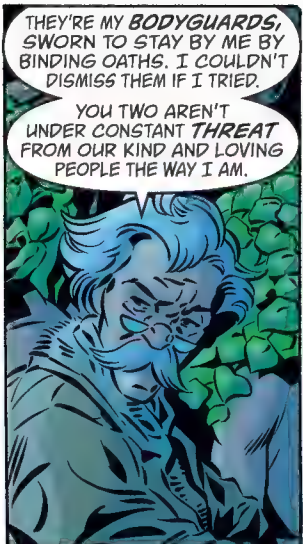






RELAX, OLD MAN. WE'RE HERE, RIGHT BEFORE DAWN AS WE AGREED.

AND WE CAME ALONE, AS AGREED. YOU DIDN'T, GEPPETTO. SEND THOSE TREE-THINGS AWAY.



THEY'RE MY **BODYGUARDS**, SWORN TO STAY BY ME BY BINDING OATHS. I COULDN'T DISMISS THEM IF I TRIED.

YOU TWO AREN'T UNDER CONSTANT **THREAT** FROM OUR KIND AND LOVING PEOPLE THE WAY I AM.



YOU DON'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF SECRET--AS IN THIS SECRET MEETING BETWEEN THE THREE OF US. **THREE** OF US, NOT FIVE.

WE MIGHT AS WELL INVITE THE WHOLE DAMNED FARM AT THIS POINT.



MIND YOUR TONGUE, ANIMAL. TREE KIND KNOW HOW TO KEEP QUIET, UNLIKE YOU BEASTS.

ANIMAL?!
BEASTS?!

OH, **LOVELY**. HERE IT COMES.



WELL, THE **ONE** ADVANTAGE OF BEING IN A DEPRESSED FUNK FOR SO LONG, NEITHER WASHING NOR DRESSING, IS YOU DON'T BURN THROUGH YOUR CLEAN CLOTHES AS FAST.





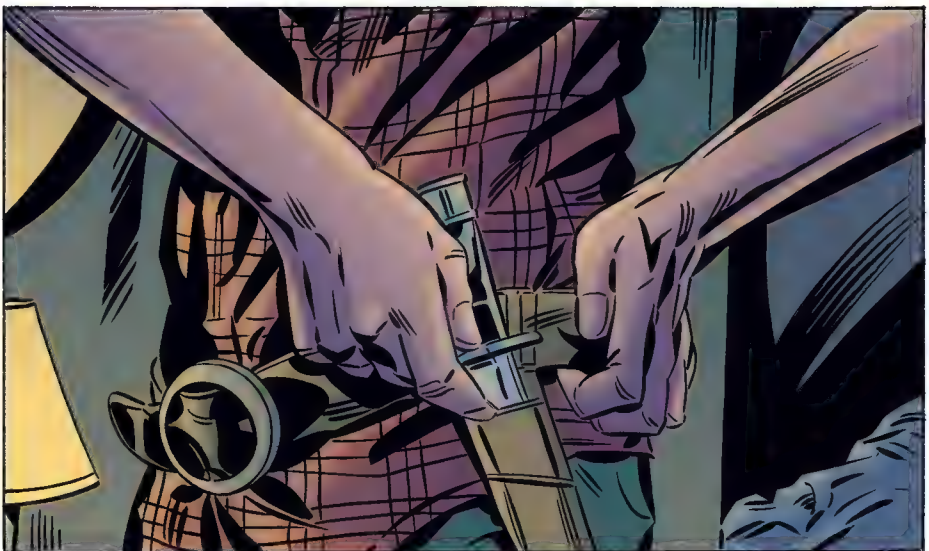
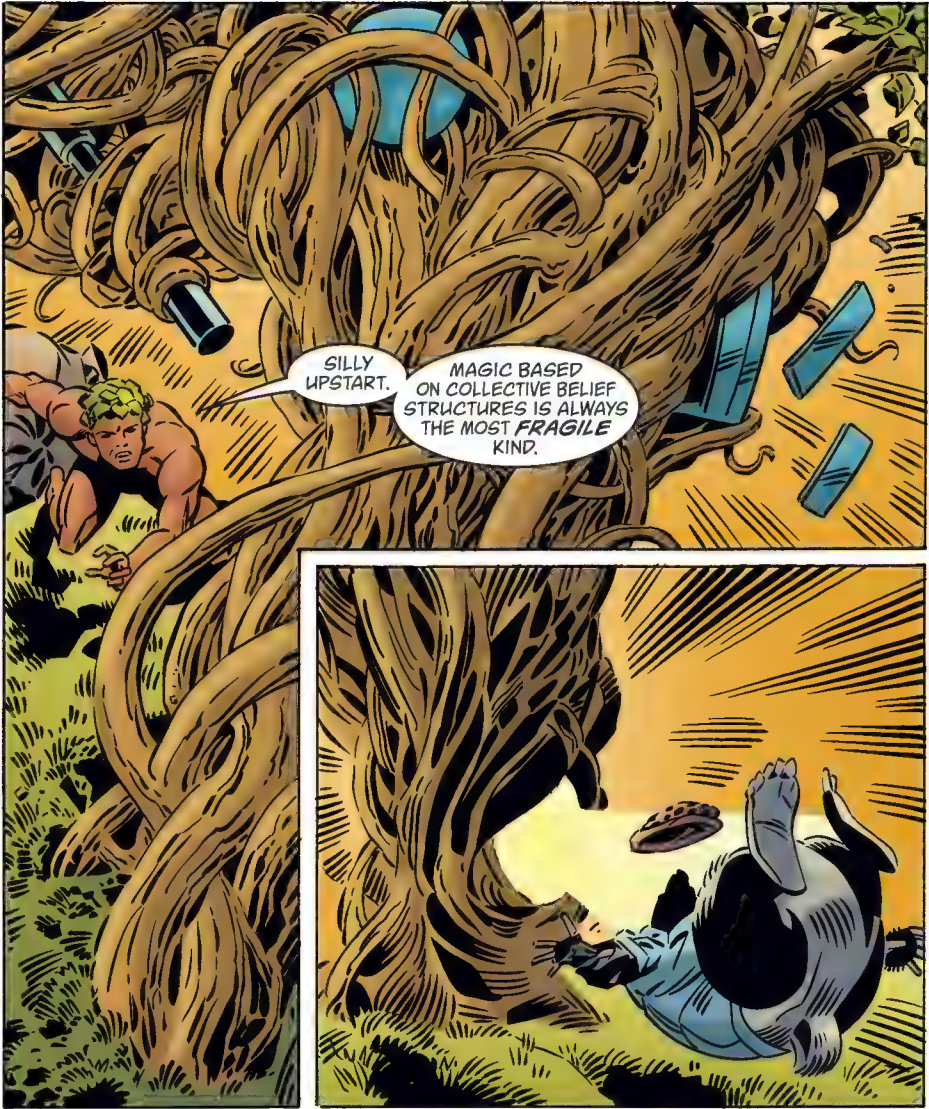
IMPRESSIVE
MAGIC, DIGGER RAT,
BUT I SUSPECT IT'S
MOSTLY SHOW.

STOP
THIS!
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING TO
ME?!



HERE
IS TRUE
POWER.







ARE YOU READY TO LISTEN TO REASON NOW, STINKY?



BROCK!

MY NAME IS BROCK!

STINKY WAS MY FARM PRISONER-BONDAGE NAME, AND I WON'T HEAR IT ANY LONGER.



FINE.

WE'RE ALL AGREED ON THAT. YOUR NAME IS BROCK BLUEHEART FROM NOW ON.

SO, GENTLEMEN, WHAT ELSE CAN WE AGREE ON WHILE WE'RE GATHERED HERE TOGETHER?

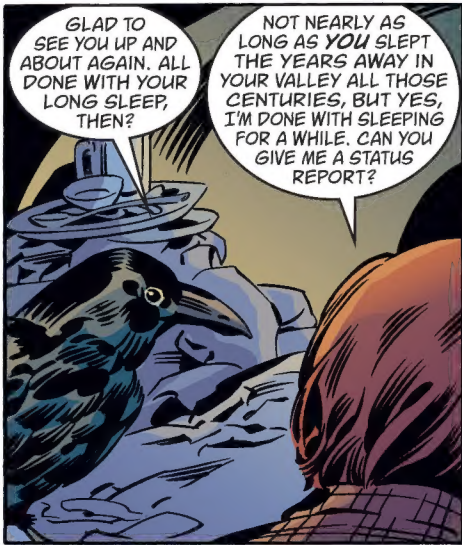


CLARA, ARE YOU OUT THERE? I'M READY TO TALK.



GOOD. I WASN'T SURE YOU WERE CLOSE ENOUGH TO HEAR ME.

I'M ALWAYS CLOSE ENOUGH TO HEAR YOU, ROSE RED.



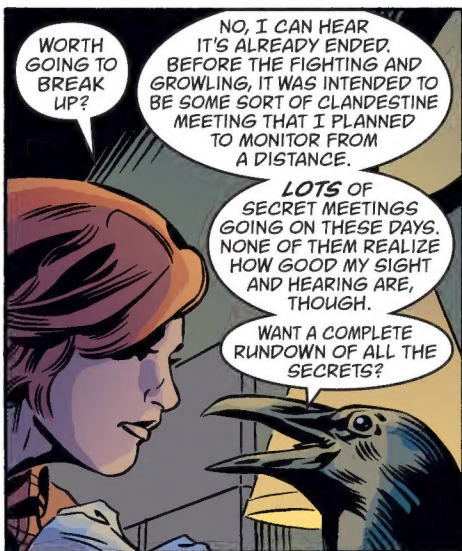
GLAD TO SEE YOU UP AND ABOUT AGAIN. ALL DONE WITH YOUR LONG SLEEP, THEN?

NOT NEARLY AS LONG AS YOU SLEPT THE YEARS AWAY IN YOUR VALLEY ALL THOSE CENTURIES, BUT YES, I'M DONE WITH SLEEPING FOR A WHILE. CAN YOU GIVE ME A STATUS REPORT?



IT'S NOT GOOD. EVERYONE'S UNHAPPY. GRUMPY, RESTLESS AND READY TO EXPLODE.

THERE'S SOME SORT OF *CONTRETEMPS* TAKING PLACE NEAR THE WOODS THAT I WAS JUST ABOUT TO INVESTIGATE WHEN YOU CALLED ME OVER.



WORTH GOING TO BREAK UP?

NO, I CAN HEAR IT'S ALREADY ENDED. BEFORE THE FIGHTING AND GROWLING, IT WAS INTENDED TO BE SOME SORT OF CLANDESTINE MEETING THAT I PLANNED TO MONITOR FROM A DISTANCE.

LOTS OF SECRET MEETINGS GOING ON THESE DAYS. NONE OF THEM REALIZE HOW GOOD MY SIGHT AND HEARING ARE, THOUGH.

WANT A COMPLETE RUNDOWN OF ALL THE SECRETS?



NO, BUT LATER I WILL. FOR RIGHT NOW I WANT YOU TO GATHER EVERYONE IN THE SQUARE AT FIRST LIGHT. EVERY FACTION LEADER. EVERY DISGRUNTLED FABLE. EVERYONE, PERIOD.

IT'S TIME TO SETTLE SOME THINGS.

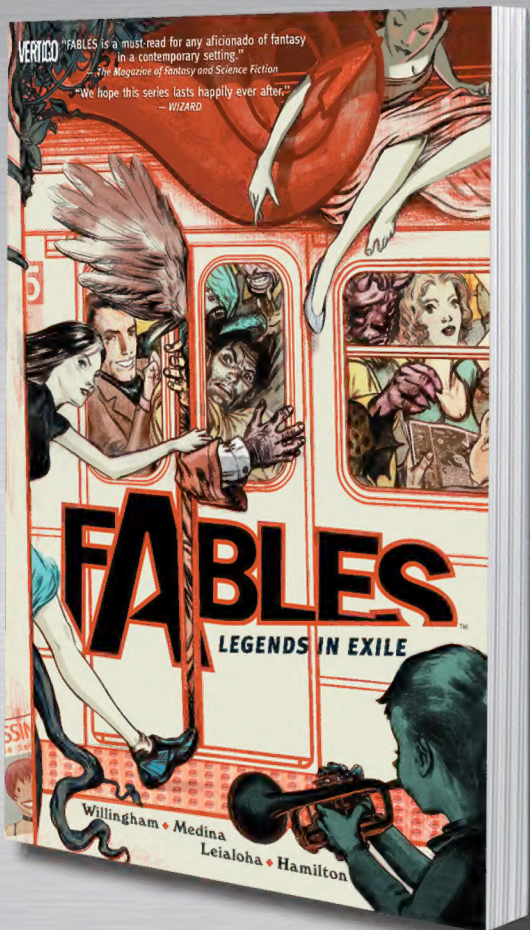
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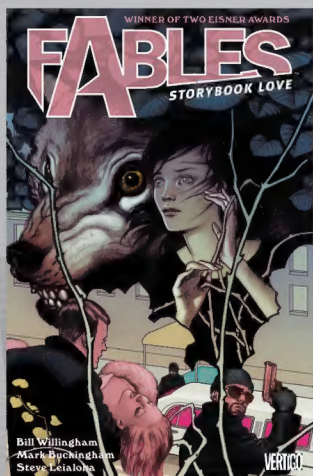
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- VOL. 4: MARCH OF THE WOODEN SOLDIERS**
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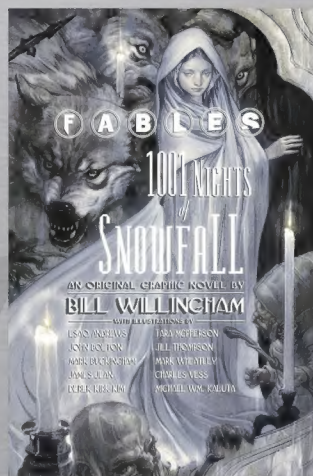
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